

Storytelling from the Perspective of a PNW Native

What Is a story?

First and foremost, a story is not an event. A forgettable book or movie is likely so because it told what happened and nothing more. In Native American society, a story is used to disseminate information, and to tell why something is the truth. The storyteller raises questions, and then looks to the characters to find the answers. And in the end, the story is about what the characters have learned along the way.

Elements of good storytelling

- Good set up. Audiences need to know who the characters are, where the characters are, and what is going on around them.
- Good questions the audience will care about need to be raised. If we learn nothing, even if we are entertained it is not a story but an event.
- A good answer is needed and in traditional storytelling the answer must be true to life. It cannot be narrow. It must be broadly applicable, or it risks being dogmatic or propaganda. For example: the solution cannot be "vote for Joe" but it can demonstrate a good candidate is someone with qualities Joe is thought to possess.
- Good pacing of information. Flooding the audience with information is a good way to lose their attention.

Elements of bad storytelling

- Does not answer the questions raised or provides stupid, unreal, or overly narrow ones.
- Makes villains who are pointless or whose presence raises no worthwhile questions. The Best villains have aims directly contributing to the conflict and are understandable on some level.
- Telling instead of showing. A good character is not given lengthy descriptions. Instead, we see him demonstrate who he is and what he does. Same goes for answers to questions raised.
- The audience must be assumed to be intelligent but not necessarily experts. To speak to an audience as if they are children is disrespectful in the extreme.